DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 831 PS 026 395

AUTHOR	Sellar, Narelle
TITLE	Organising Resources in Early Childhood Services.
INSTITUTION	Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc., Watson.
ISBN	ISBN-1-875890-32-7
ISSN	ISSN-1320-2170
PUB DATE	1997-12-00
NOTE	20p.; Photographs may not reproduce well.
AVAILABLE FROM	Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc., P.O. Box 105, Watson, ACT 2602; phone: 02-6241-6900, 800-356-900; fax: 02-6241-5547; e-mail: national@acca.org.au (Yearly 4-issue subscription, $35 (Australian); $40 for overseas subscriptions).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
JOURNAL CIT	AECA Resource Book Series; v4 n4 Dec 1997
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Childrens Literature; *Day Care Centers; *Early Childhood Education; *Educational Resources; Instructional Materials; *Organization; Puzzles; Staff Development
IDENTIFIERS	*Organizational Skills; *Organizing Strategies

ABSTRACT

The importance of the availability of material resources in early childhood services, including children's and staff materials such as games and art supplies, books, blocks, toys, and other materials, should not be underestimated. When resources are stored in an attractive and easily accessible manner they are more likely to be used effectively. This booklet is designed to assist early childhood personnel in establishing effective practices for the organization of these resources. The booklet's contents are: (1) why organize?; (2) where to start; (3) setting up an inventory; (4) inventory categories; (5) children's books; (6) the book inventory; (7) classifying books; (8) storage of books; (9) puzzles; (10) acquisition of puzzles; (11) classification of puzzles; (12) storage of puzzles; (13) blocks; (14) storage of blocks; (15) care of blocks; (16) staff resources; (17) use of staff resources; (18) staff quiz; and (19) conclusion. (EV)

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AECA Resource Book Series
Volume 4 – Number 4 December 1997

ED 417 831

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by Narelle Sellar

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The AECA Resource Book Series is published four times each year by the Australian Early Childhood Association.

The series aims to provide practical, easy to read, up-to-date information and support to a growing national readership of early childhood workers. The books bring together the best information available on wide ranging topics and are an ideal resource for children's services workers and others interested in the care and education of young children. Books produced in previous years have now become standard texts in many early childhood courses.

The Resource Book Committee invites contributions on all aspects of the education and care of young children. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of the field, contributions from all disciplines concerned with young children and their families are welcome.

All Resource Book manuscripts are required to undergo a blind review by readers experienced in the field and will not necessarily be published. The style of the Resource Books must be simple and informative. Jargon and the presumption of prior knowledge should be avoided. Guidelines for contributors are available on request from the Publications Section.

ISSN 1320-2170
ISBN 1 875890 32 7
Photography by Barry Brown
Printed by Goanna Print, Canberra

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Yearly (4 issues) $35 including postage.

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Registered for posting as a publication — PP232100/00036

Organising Resources

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About the author

Narelle Sellar Dip. NSTC (Syd), L.Th, Dip. RE, has been involved in early childhood education for more than thirty years. During that time she has worked in a range of services from the east to the west coast, in cities and in the outback. These experiences have raised her interest in providing well organised resources in early childhood centres. As director of a long day care centre, Narelle places a high value on an environment which works well for both children and staff.

Organising Resources
in Early Childhood Services

Why organise?

The importance of the availability of material resources in early childhood services should not be underestimated. This booklet is designed to assist early childhood personnel to establish effective practices for the organisation of these resources.

A children's service usually commences operation with an equipment allowance. Ongoing purchases are necessary, however, for the establishment of a rich environment for the children, and these require fund raising, donations, grants, and a lot of hard work. It is important that parents and managing bodies aim to build up and replace equipment each year to ensure the maintenance of a high quality program.

Purchase of materials requires thought and care to ensure staff and children gain maximum benefits. Lack of planning may result in an abundance of one type of equipment and very little of another, or purchases may be heavily biased towards one age group. For example, an industrious preschool teacher may ensure that there is adequate equipment in the preschool room, while in the nursery the babies are being stimulated by a few stuffed toys and some second-hand rattles!

Attractively presented and well-maintained age-appropriate resources contribute significantly to the quality of learning experiences for children. They give a positive impression to parents and visitors, and enable staff to provide an effective and interesting learning environment for the children in their care.

An efficient inventory—one which is well set out, regularly up-dated and consulted when purchases are contemplated—will help overcome problems of inequity. Areas of need will be easily identified: it is obvious from a list if no equipment has been purchased for some time, or if equipment needs replacing or updating.

Another factor which will greatly enhance the efficient use of resources is storage. When resources are stored in an attractive and easily accessible manner they are more likely to be used effectively. The worst scenario is the storeroom where everything is jumbled together. If there is no inventory to which staff can refer, then the problem is exacerbated. In this situation, is it any wonder that busy staff take what is most accessible; not necessarily the most appropriate?

When resources are stored in an attractive and easily accessible manner they are more likely to be used effectively.

Good organisation of resources not only means effective utilisation but an extension of the lifespan of the equipment. When books, puzzles and games are returned to a clear, well-ordered storage place, it is likely that the need for repairs will be noted and carried out, and lost pieces located. It is possible to establish guidelines which encourage this routine. For example, establish a routine where all books needing repair are placed in a repair basket when exchanging books for the children's shelves. Stocktakes are also a good time for noticing the need for repairs.

Children need access to equipment which is varied, appropriate, and in good condition, and this is achievable when resources are well-organised. Children are greatly influenced by their physical environment: a setting which is orderly and uncluttered will enable children to find materials and equipment as they need them. An organised setting also facilitates independence of choice, and the ability to work alone when packing away . The fact that staff can locate and rotate equipment available to children ensures the variety and interest which enriches children's experiences.

Storerooms which need to accommodate everything from collage materials to boxes of fruit can be daunting when it comes to organising resources. If they have become an untidy dumping ground, the task is even more difficult and time consuming. However, every storeroom can be improved.

But there's not enough room!

Adequate storage space is a significant factor in using resources to maximum benefit. Limited storage exists in most centres, and needs to be considered when organising the equipment. When planning or renovating storage, think BIG! Centres can never have too much space, and it is easier to implement the following ideas and to store equipment effectively if there is ample and accessible storage.

When assessing storage possibilities, start with the central or main storeroom. If space and finances are restricted, consider extra open shelving at adult height in the storeroom or in the playrooms. This is usually the cheapest option and least likely to interfere with children's play space. The drawback is that it can create an untidy, cluttered appearance.

Consider the whole centre. Effective and creative use may be made of an office, staffroom, foyer, or corridor.

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Where do we start organising?

There are two steps involved.

1. Make a list of the equipment. This is the inventory, i.e. where the resources are organised on paper or disk.
2. Put the equipment in appropriate locations. The equipment needs to be appropriately organised in cupboards, shelves and containers. Locations will be determined by facilities and requirements of individual centres.

Following are some basic methods for organising material resources typically found in early childhood services. These are the result of years of experience in many different centres, and will need to be adapted to individual needs and requirements.

The usefulness of books and puzzles is also enhanced if they are stored in an orderly and logical manner. However, this is a complex process and for this reason I have expanded on effective organisation of these resources. A section that deals with blocks is also included because this expensive and valuable teaching resource requires careful maintenance and storage.

First set up your inventory

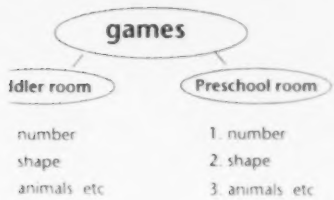
Each centre or service must determine what information will be most useful in meeting its own specific requirements. Questions to be considered are 'what categories should we use?' and 'what details should we record on our inventory?' Individual centres might choose to stipulate a minimum cost for an item before it is recorded; it may not be necessary to record a low cost item which is likely to have only a short 'shelf life'.

Inventory categories will vary from centre to centre. The suggested categories listed below can be adapted to your individual needs. Some categories will need to be broken down into sub-categories. In some cases this may be done according to rooms within the centre. In other cases, resources, particularly those which are used across the whole centre, may need to be categorised according to other criteria such as level of difficulty or subject matter. Children's books, puzzles, and staff resources have centre-wide use and will certainly need expansion.

The inventory

This is a basic tool for organising resources and includes all of the equipment in the centre. It is of value for insurance and accounting purposes, for budgeting, and simply for keeping track of which areas might need building up or replenishing. With a new centre this can be fairly easily accomplished as purchases are made. In an established centre a stocktake may be needed. Those centres with an existing inventory may find that its value is increased by revising its format and content.

Decide on your categories and sub-categories before recording any information, for example:



What inventory categories should we use?

Following are some suggested categories. Where possible, decide on categories and sub-categories before recording information in the inventory. Some categories are most useful when broken down into quite specific components. For instance, you may choose to list games (the primary categories) under rooms (the secondary category), and then under types of games (the tertiary category). And think ahead: just because your centre has only one lotto game and one sort of dominoes now, does not mean that one day it may not possess any number of the enormous variety of these on the market.

Appropriate category headings and sub-headings can be set up on any number of computer packages, and it's easier if you establish your heading styles before keying in your information.

Possible categories for an inventory (in alphabetical order)

Administration
1. Furniture
   a. Office
   b. Staffroom
   c. Foyer
2. Equipment

Art and craft
1. Art
2. Craft

Block play
1. Blocks
2. Accessories

Cognitive games
1. Nursery
2. Toddlers
3. Preschool

Electrical

Furniture
1. Nursery
2. Toddlers
3. Preschool

Health, toilets, laundry

Musical equipment
1. CDs or cassettes
2. Instruments

Outdoor equipment
1. General
2. Gross motor
3. Carpentry
4. Water
5. Sand play

Home corner
1. Furniture
2. Accessories

Indoor fixtures
1. Nursery
2. Toddlers
3. Preschool

Indoor play equipment
1. Nursery
2. Toddlers
3. Preschool

Kitchen

Library
1. Books
2. Accessories

Manipulative equipment
1. Nursery
2. Toddlers
3. Preschool

Maintenance equipment

Outdoor fixtures

Puzzles

Teaching resources
1. Picture sets
2. Aids
3. Resource books

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What details go into the inventory?

Column headings need to be informative and relevant to your needs. The information recorded will vary depending on the purpose of the inventory. For example, the main purpose may be a record of value for insurance purposes, in which case it will be important to record the cost and purchase date. In other cases, the supplier's name might be important, and it is often invaluable to be able to easily identify where an item was purchased. It is better to enter too much information than too little, as it is difficult to add it at a later date. The minimum information required would include *item*, ***number***, *purchase date*, *supplier*, *cost* and *cancellation date*.

Example of an inventory entry

Administration

1. Furniture

1.1 Office

Item	Number	Purchase date	Cost	Supplier	Date cancelled
Desks	2	3/ 1986	250.00	Cheap'n'Nasty	

Books are subject to rigorous usage and should be given both initial protection and on-going maintenance.

How should we store the inventory?

If your inventory is computer-based, a hard copy should be made available for ready reference. The hard copy, typed or hand-written inventories may be kept in a ring-back folder or card file. A copy should be kept somewhere other than the centre in case of fire, theft or loss. Easy access to the inventory will promote familiarity with its contents, and skill in locating helpful information recorded there.

Children's Books

Acquisition of children's books

Children's books are one of the most valuable resources in a centre. Books should be purchased thoughtfully, catalogued logically, covered if necessary, and stored appropriately. Hard-cover books are more suited to use with groups, and longer lasting. They are also easier to find in the bookshelf because the title usually appears on the spine. A centre's books are subject to rigorous usage and should be given both initial protection and on-going maintenance to extend their shelf-life. It is important that your centre not only provide a model of caring for books, but also present its books in a manner that children will find attractive and interesting.

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After books are purchased, details need to be recorded as part of the inventory. Alternatively, a second folder or card file may be used for this section of the inventory to cope with more frequent reference.

Headings in the book inventory

Column headings for book inventories will differ from headings used in the rest of the inventory. Details to be kept on record may vary according to the requirements of individual centres, but basic components would include *cost, author, book title, purchase date, acquisition* (or catalogue) *number,* and *supplier.* Other helpful information is *subject, book description* (hard-back, paperback, cardboard book), and *cancellation date.*

Example of a book inventory

Purchased	Acq. No.	Author	Title	Description	Cost	Subject	Supplier
June 1989	37	BRUNA, D	*Miffy*	CB	6.00	Community	Booko's
July 1989	43	BAKER, J	*Window*	HB	20.00	Environment	Educ. Bks.

Details recorded on the book

Some inventory details need to be recorded on the book itself. An identification number (the acquisition number) should be recorded on the title page. Care should be taken to identify the title page correctly. It is not necessarily the first page in the book, but the one which displays the title, the author and the publisher. One way to create an acquisition number is to use the first three letters of the author's name, followed by a number. The number is a simple record of the order of acquisition. That is, the first book recorded is given number one, and the final number used should indicate how many books are in the library. These details should appear in the top right-hand corner of the title page. It can also be useful to write the price of the book in the bottom right-hand corner.

Example of an acquisition number on a title page

BAK
123

Where the Forest Meets the Sea
by Jeannie Baker
Julia MacRae Books

10

$14.95

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Details on the spine of the book

Subject classification details need to be recorded on the spine of the book so that they are visible when the book is stored on the shelf. A simple method is to allocate each classification a symbol, such as a coloured self-adhesive dot label. If the book is to be covered with contact or plastic, the symbols should be put on beforehand. If the book is not to be covered, the symbol itself must be covered to ensure it stays put.

Classifying books into subjects

To classify books, it is important that the staff who are using the books be consulted for specific requirements. It is worth discussing the desirability of separate sections for specific themes or subjects which recur regularly in your centre activities. Other points for discussion include whether books with a multicultural perspective should be in a separate area or whether they should be integrated throughout all subject areas. A basic list to start from might include the following categories:

Self (body and senses)
Self (home life)
Community workers
Transport
Animals and birds
Celebrations
Fantasy and imagination
Traditional stories (e.g. fairy stories)
Reading readiness texts
Colour/shape/number
Aboriginal culture
Concepts (e.g. size, opposites)
Natural science
Seasons and weather.

Each of these subject classifications would be identified by a different coloured self-adhesive dot. A list of the classifications with their symbols should be recorded in the front of the book inventory for easy referral when entering details in the inventory. A copy of the list of classifications and symbols near the central book storage area is also helpful for staff when choosing and returning books.

Using a data base for your book inventory

If you have a data base, or funds available to purchase one, it is time well spent to use it for your inventory. It is a lengthy process to enter an established library, but a great asset if you are just starting. The advantage of a data base is that you can enter a number of classifications beside each book and then call them up as desired. For instance, *Where the Forest Meets the Sea* may be categorised under the environment, families, imagination, time. Then you could use your data base to find all the books on time, or the environment, or those written by Jeannie Baker, or those suitable for a particular age group, and so on.

Handy hint

It's worth investing in some book-covering contact rather than the ordinary sort from the local supermarket. You can buy a 'low-tack' type which is more forgiving of mistakes than other varieties. A dispenser which accommodates a variety of book mending tapes (magic mending tape, spine repair tape, etc.) will also make book maintenance easier.

Example of a classification index

Self (body and senses)	*small red circle*
Self (home life)	*large yellow circle*
Community	*large orange circle*

A simple, visible secondary classification is also useful. For instance, books which are particularly suitable for under-three's might have a small light-blue sticker placed above their classification symbol. The books which are of cardboard (and normally within this range) and therefore suitable for babies might have a dot drawn on the light-blue sticker. For busy staff, this can make choosing books a quick and easy process.

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Books need to be readily accessible for staff and children. The books on the children's shelves should be changed frequently, be age appropriate, and reflect the current interests and curriculum. An easy to use, efficient storage system will encourage staff in the careful and thoughtful choice of books for the children.

How to store books

Ideally, books are placed on shelves where they can be stored according to their major classification. The name of the subject classification and its identifying symbol can be displayed on the shelf to make for easy selection and return. Where possible, books should be stored in one central location, but each room should have shelves where books are accessible to children. Older children can be encouraged to use the central book storage shelves to find information on particular topics.

Central storage means staff must go regularly to central 'library shelves' to find books. This offers extra choice and makes it easier to keep track of damaged books. One or more staff members should be trained to repair books, and proper book repair materials should always be available. 'Quick' running repairs with sticky tape are unsatisfactory; children's books are expensive and should be repaired correctly.

Steps to follow when processing a newly purchased book

1. Determine its subject classification—place appropriate symbol on the spine.
2. Allocate its acquisition number and record it on the title page.
3. Record details in the book inventory.
4. Cover book appropriately.
5. Place it in the correct position on the library shelves.
6. Keep a record of the last acquisition number you have allocated.

Puzzles

Puzzles are another item of equipment which can represent a large capital outlay. They are also a valuable teaching resource and have the same needs in use and care as books. That is:

- they need to be changed often and must therefore be organised and accessible;
- they need to be classified according to difficulty.

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Acquisition of puzzles

When puzzles are purchased they need to be recorded in an inventory as *item, number, purchase date, cost, supplier, cancellation.* Each puzzle should also be given an identification number. This should be recorded:

- in an extra column in the inventory;
- on the back of the puzzle frame;
- on the back of each separate puzzle piece. This step is helpful to staff when faced with a multitude of puzzle pieces, or when trying to find a solitary piece.

Classification of puzzles

Puzzles should be categorised according to their level of difficulty. Probably the easiest way to determine the difficulty of puzzles is by counting the number of pieces they contain. There are, however, problems with this method. There is an increasing tendency by the manufacturers of puzzles to make puzzles that are attractive but which fail to provide cues of both picture and shape. Indeed, some puzzles with only a small number of pieces are only completed by luck at first, and then by memory. If you purchase this sort of puzzle, you will need to take this factor into account—as well as the number of pieces it contains—when determining its level of difficulty. With this in mind you may find the following categories helpful:

- Easy—up to 10 pieces
- Medium—from 10–15 pieces
- Hard—from 15–20 pieces
- Advanced—more than 20 pieces.

An easy method of identifying the category to which a puzzle belongs need to be established. For example:

- the identifying letter in the top right-hand corner (e.g. E, M, H, A)
- the above, combined with a colour—Easy (blue), Medium (black), Hard (green), Advanced (red).

The identifying letter is then written in the appropriate colour and a coloured strip drawn along the edge of the frame so that it is visible when the puzzles are stored flat.

There is a tendency to categorise puzzles according to subjects, however this is not a useful method. ***The level of the children's skills must be the first consideration when selecting puzzles;*** *their ability to complete the puzzles with enjoyment is of greater importance than the picture which appears on the puzzles.*

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Taking time to classify and organise puzzles can pay enormous dividends for staff and children. Staff will be able to quickly identify the section of puzzles most suitable for the age group they are working with. Children who are ready for further challenge may be catered for without the necessity of counting puzzle pieces or relying on staff's knowledge of the puzzles.

How to store puzzles

Puzzles should be stored in one central location. This has a number of advantages:

- Staff can easily find puzzles to suit a wide range of skills.
- Children are less likely to be restricted in the options available to them.
- The reunion of a lost piece with its puzzle will probably be a quicker process if staff only have to look in one central storage area.

Puzzles should also be stored according to category, i.e. whether Easy, Medium, Hard or Advanced. Shelves should be labelled with all relevant information, e.g. Medium (M) 10–15 pieces (black).

Within their categories, puzzles may be further divided according to subject matter if desired, e.g. transport, Australian animals, multicultural, occupations. This will enable staff to choose puzzles to suit current themes and interests if they wish, always being aware that they should be conscious of the skill level of the children. Again, this type of system of organising will make it easy to highlight the areas in which there is a need for further resources, whether of skill level or subject matter.

Blocks

Organisation of blocks

A good set of quality unit blocks is one of the most valuable items of play equipment. It is also one of the most expensive. It is worth taking time to organise them so that children and staff will gain maximum use.

Blocks should be stored in open shelving at child height. There should be ample space so that blocks are not crowded. If the shelves are movable units rather than attached to the wall, they can be utilised as room dividers to cut off the block play area if desired. Movable units also lend themselves to flexibility in positioning the blocks anywhere within the centre, on the verandah, or in the playground. The block shelves should be placed so that blocks are available daily.

When it comes to actual placement of the blocks on the shelves, some points to keep in mind are:

- blocks should be systematically arranged so that children can see at a glance what is available, and to recognise their options;
- blocks should be arranged with the long side showing. If they are arranged so that the 'ends' are facing outward there is no way of differentiating between units and half-units.

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The position for each shape's storage area should be marked on the shelf in some way. This may be by means of outlines drawn on shelves, or cut-outs from plain Contact. Packing away can become a valuable learning experience in itself when children are required to practice observation and matching skills.

Caring for your blocks

Blocks should be kept clean in the same manner as other equipment with regular dusting, and when necessary, wiping over with hot soapy water. They should also be regularly oiled with a mixture of linseed oil and mineral turpentine (about 4:1). Occasionally, blocks will need more attention than this if they become badly scored or are splintery, and they may need to be sanded before oiling.

Staff resource library

Staff resources can include books, videos, picture sets, and posters. These are of great value to staff and to the children in their care. Staff resource books is one area where the benefit to children may seem less obvious, and may therefore be the first to suffer from lack of funds. Nevertheless, centres should aim to build up a staff resource library, albeit slowly and over a period of years. The library needs to be organised to encourage use, facilitate easy identification of the area of interest, and to make it obvious which areas need additional resources.

A well-organised staff library can be of great benefit to staff, especially those undertaking outside study, and also to students placed in the centre. Their recommendations can be used for foundation texts for the library. Parents will also appreciate access and borrowed reading materials may be a useful basis for discussion between parents and staff.

Classifying staff resources

These books need to be catalogued in much the same way as the children's library. That is, they should be classified, given an acquisition number, and recorded in an inventory (either within the main inventory or in a separate folder).

Examples of staff library categories for classification purposes are:

Journals
The arts
Administration
Equipment
Family
Child protection
Special needs
Music
Maths and science
Gross motor
Catalogues
Accreditation
Human development
Babies/toddlers/preschoolers
Health and safety
Multiculturalism
Gender equity
Curriculum resources
Literacy

Storing staff resources

If the staff library can be stored in the staff room it can be used for 'browsing' by staff. Staff should also be able to borrow books. A simple method of keeping track of books is to have an exercise book drawn up with headings, e.g. *date*, *name*, *book*, *returned*. Staff should be responsible for recording this information themselves.

Helping staff to use resources effectively

Once the centre's resources have been catalogued, classified and stored appropriately, staff should then agree on procedures for using resources. Encouraging effective use of resources might begin with new staff being given a detailed 'tour' of the centre, which includes information on storage of resources. If the centre has a staff orientation manual this information can be detailed there. A permanent notice on the staff notice board can also be a reminder of some of the important details.

Sample notice. (This notice may be copied or adapted for use in your service.)

Use of staff resources

The centre has a large number of resources available to assist staff to provide a varied and stimulating program for the children. You are encouraged to take the time to get to know the resources we have, to make regular use of the materials, and to change them often. Please treat the materials with great care, providing a good model to encourage the children to also protect our equipment.

Children's books (stored in .....)
When borrowing, choose appropriately, i.e. cardboard books for babies, blue dots for toddlers. When returning, check the need for repair (place books on repair shelf if necessary). Check the classification label and return to the correct shelf.

Children's puzzles (stored in .....)
When choosing puzzles, be aware of the level of difficulty. When returning puzzles, ensure that all pieces are in the puzzle and store each puzzle tidily on the correct shelf.

Manipulative equipment (stored in .....)
When returning equipment, ensure all the pieces are placed in the correct containers. Return containers to the correct shelves and store with their identifying labels visible.

Cassettes and CDs (stored in .....)
When borrowing, check that the cassette or CD is in the correct case. Please rewind before returning. Place them in the correct case and return them to the correct position on the storage shelves.

Staff library (stored in .....)
Record the date, your name and the book title in the borrowing book. Tick the 'Returned' column in the borrowing book when returning your library book.

Teaching aids (stored in .....)
When returning, check that the contents are complete and placed in the correct container.

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Sample staff quiz. (This quiz may be copied or adapted for use in your service.)

Staff should be encouraged to make themselves familiar with what is available and update their knowledge regularly. Asking a member of staff to present a 'tour of the children's library shelves' for a staff meeting can be an effective way of maintaining awareness.

Staff quiz on centre resources

A. Children's books

1. How do you find a book on a specific topic?
2. Name some categories under which books are listed.
3. How do you identify books which are particularly suitable for the under threes?
4. How do you identify cardboard books?
5. How often do you think books on children's shelves should be changed?

B. Posters/picture sets

1. Where are posters and picture sets stored?
2. How can you find pictures on a particular topic?
3. What 'clues' are available to help you return pictures to the right places?
4. In what ways can pictures be used in child care?
5. How often do you think pictures on the walls should be changed?

C. Puzzles

1. How are the puzzles graded?
2. Which age would 'easy' puzzles suit?
3. Which puzzles are intended for use by preschoolers in the later part of the year?
4. How do you know which section of the cupboard to return puzzles to?

D. Staff resources

1. What should you do if borrowing an item from the staff library?
2. Have you ever borrowed a book from our library?
3. What are three different types of staff resources available in the staff room?

E. Indoor play equipment

1. What 'whole centre' resources are stored in
   a. The toddlers' room cupboards?
   b. The preschool cupboards?
   c. The storeroom?

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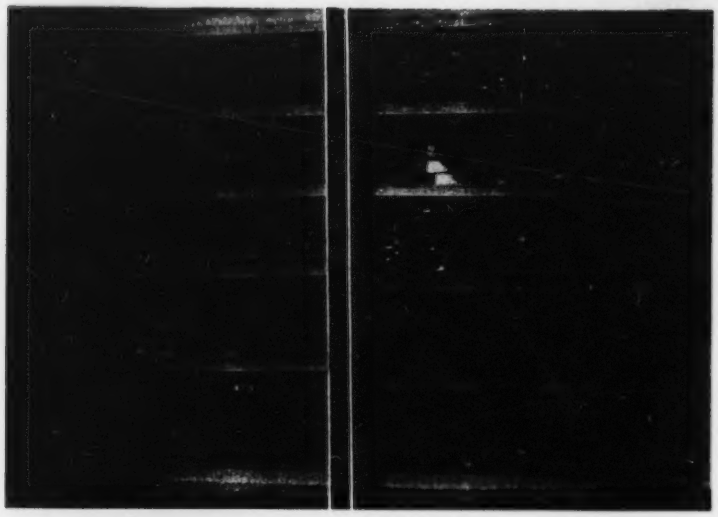

Conclusion

When setting about organising a centre's resources the aims need to be clear. These will include maximising benefits to the children, improving accessibility for the staff and parents, encouraging efficient use of space, providing ease of accountability for funding bodies, and maintaining the ability to meet insurance requirements. The degree to which the preceding suggestions are utilised will depend on the aims for individual centres. Careful thought before embarking on this project will avoid the possible hazards of either a cumbersome, time-consuming process, or token system which does not meet the centre's needs!

It is important to master the basic tools of the inventory, book and puzzle catalogues and efficient storage systems. These can be used to meet the needs of individual centres.

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